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## Traveler's Diarrhea—The Rule of Ps

FORTUNATELY, TRAVELER'S DIARRHEA IS A PREVENTABLE DISEASE. I recommend what I call the Traveler's Rule of Ps, that is, one should only consume foods and beverages that are peeled, packaged, purified, or piping hot. Most of the enteric organisms that cause diarrhea, as well as polio and hepatitis and so on, occur either in tap water, ice, or fresh fruits and vegetables.

If you can peel the fresh fruit and vegetables, they're safe. So mangos, oranges, bananas, and so on, are perfectly safe, no matter where you are. Grapes or tomatoes, however, unless you're willing to peel them, are not.

Packaged food is almost always safe. There have been occasional horror stories: bottled water in Mexico causing an epidemic of diarrhea, and so on, but this is very, very rare. In fact, if something seems reliably packaged and has a seal and looks like it was commercially done, then virtually everywhere in the world, it is safe to consume.

Purified refers primarily to water; and sterilized, purified water is now available, increasingly, throughout most of the common tourist destinations in Mexico and other parts of the commonly-visited developing world.

Remember, though, that ice can carry germs, too. This is one mistake that travelers make quite commonly. Unless the ice is purified—and it is very hard to get accurate information about this—it is best to stay away from it. Just because you're in a fancy place, a fancy hotel, does not mean that the ice is purified or that the water is safe to drink.

Piping hot is probably the most important thing. By that, I mean that if you eat food that has been cooked *now* and served piping hot *this moment* and not touched by anyone else between the time when it's hot and when you eat it, it is 95% + safe. Now, that's not to say something that was well cooked and has cooled off is safe.

—ROBERT B. BARON, MD

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